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The Real Iranian Terrorist

While Israel and the United States were selling arms to Iran behind the backs of Congress and the world, the State Department was quietly trashing the first effective anti-Khomeini opposition in Iran, called the People's Mojahedin, as "anti-democratic, anti-American" and using "terrorism."

Those words by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy were volunteered to a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on July 24, 1985. Immediately thereafter, they were secretly exploited by the arms-sales promoters as evidence of Reagan administration backing for the Khomeini regime.

Yet today, five months after the exposure and collapse of the secret arms-for-hostages deal, George Shultz's State Department still peddles

the same line. Despite the terrorist deaths of 241 Marines in a Beirut barracks and scores of lesser atrocities by Khomeini's men, the only effective opposition to the ayatollah is equally damned as "terrorist." In fact, Shultz has barred all contact with any internal or external resistance to Khomeini, creating a debilitating policy vacuum.

The vacuity of Shultz's policy is sounding alarm bells. In Congress, Rep. Dan Burton of Indiana, who ranks near the top of the purity list for conservative Republicans, told us he had quietly approached the State Department to get it to "update" U.S. policy as represented by Murphy's harsh attack on the Mojahedin and take advantage of its success in fighting Khomeini.

"Every bit of evidence I have shows

that although the Mojahedin is not pro-American, it is not pro-Soviet and not pro-communist," Burton told us. His colleague on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, liberal Democratic Rep. Mervyn Dymally, is taking a similar tack for the same reason: despite pressure from Israel to do nothing that might hurt Iran in its war with Iraq, the United States should not sit still on the sidelines while Khomeini's radical Shiite fundamentalist regime runs wild through the Middle East.

Beyond Congress, former National Security Council aide Dr. Geoffrey Kemp described the Mojahedin to us as "a force that the United States should certainly talk to." Kemp played a key role in U.S. Mideast policy-making during the Reagan administration's first

term. He resigned several months before Israel obtained President Reagan's consent to the first arms-sale.

The significance of Murphy's unscheduled 1985 attack on the Mojahedin may not have been appreciated by Murphy himself. But in fact, the Tower Commission report includes a letter it believes was written by arms-sale middleman Manucher Ghorbanifar to his Iranian contact ("my dear and esteemed brother"). The 1986 letter listed "positive and constructive steps" taken by the Reagan administration to send "a sign of good will and utmost respect toward the Islamic Republic."

Step No. 4 on the list embodied the gist of Murphy's 1985 testimony, described by Ghorbanifar as follows:

"An official announcement terming the Mojahedin Organization terrorist and Marxist, [with] a circular to Congress . . . banning any and all kinds of assistance to the opponents of the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran"—Khomeini's regime.

Administration officials familiar with this background believe pressure from Israel may be one reason the State Department remains so hostile to the Mojahedin opposition. Israel's implacable Arab foes include Iraq, Iran's enemy in the seven-year war. Israel pushed the Iran arms sales on the Reagan administration partly to strengthen Iran's military position against Iraq. U.S. support today for the Mojahedin, or any other anti-Khomeini resistance, could undermine Iran's war-fighting ability, thus helping Iraq.

The top man in the Mojahedin, Massoud Rajavi, lives in Baghdad as a guest of the Iraqi government. He was jailed by the shah's regime in 1971. When he got out in 1979 he became Khomeini's bitterest political foe, quickly racking up a number of surprising successes in hit-and-run assassination attacks on high officials.

The State Department says these killings, plus almost daily military skirmishes against Khomeini's armed guards and military units, make the Mojahedin "terrorist." We asked a State Department official if the Mojahedin was more terrorist than the Khomeini regime—mass killer of Marines, murderer of a CIA station chief and truck-bomber of the American Embassy in Beirut, as well as holder of American hostages and hijacker of American planes.

His answer: the United States opposes all forms of terrorism. That response, dictated by top-level policy-makers who take their orders from George Shultz, is dangerously naive. If it is not replaced soon by a serious policy, the Reagan administration cannot claim to have clambered out of the Iran arms scandal. The horrors of Khomeini's Iran need stemming, and the Mojahedin could be the right place to start.

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